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URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

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URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

ST. HELENA, CALIFORNIA

OCTOBER 1987

For use in the Design, Development and Review of various urban development projects in the City of St. Helena.

Adopted by the St. Helena Planning Commission on September 1, 1987

Adopted by the St. Helena City Council on October 12, 1987

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PROLOGUE

St. Helena has always been a special place. Lying just below the narrowest point of the Napa Valley, where the rocky, arid hills on the east and lushly wooded Spring Mountain on the west converge, it is defined by its remarkable geographical setting. When you drive in from the south, the familiar stone walls and Victorian cupola of the Ritchie Block--the town's architectural signature--are outlined against the ridge. Mt. St. Helena, twice as tall as the other peaks, looms solitary to the north. On the eastern edge of town, the Napa River divides valley and uplands. York and Sulphur Creeks feed it from the west.

The climate is mild, with soggy winters and dry, brown summers typical of Northern California, but the weather can be as dramatic as the landscape. In winter, the creeks come alive and the river often floods its banks. Snow and hail are not unknown during the rainy season, and wispy, short-lived mists rise off the valley floor after a rain. Between the narrow horizons of the ridges, the sky changes quickly and clouds move fast. In summer, the creeks dry up or dwindle, and the river moves imperceptibly. Furious brushfires occur unpredictably when the hot winds come down from the north. More often thick, wet sea fogs flow over the western ridge from Sonoma. Sometimes in the fall, the atmosphere is more that of a Sierra town, the air clear and crisp and smelling of river stone and spicy sweet conifers.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. The study is designed to explore the factors that influence the outcome of the research. The research is conducted in a systematic and scientific manner, following the principles of research methodology. The study is divided into several sections, including the introduction, literature review, methodology, results, and conclusion. The introduction provides a brief overview of the study and its objectives. The literature review discusses the existing research on the topic and identifies the gaps in the knowledge. The methodology section describes the research design, data collection, and analysis. The results section presents the findings of the study, and the conclusion summarizes the main points and provides recommendations for future research.

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Agriculture has shaped St. Helena, too. On the floor of the valley, vineyards allow long views. Gently rising and falling plateaus of vines give way abruptly to wooded knolls and slopes that climb in steps to the ridges. Between the vineyards and along creeks and roadways are huge ancient oaks and black walnuts. Remnants of once-ubiquitous prune and walnut orchards can still be found, and cattle still graze nearby. In the hills chaparral, madrone, bay and redwood enclose and sometimes overwhelm worked clearings. In St. Helena, the land is productive.

The area was once the site of Wappo Indian encampments and later the Rancho Carne Humana landgrant. Vineyard disking still turns up mortars and spearpoints, and grant boundaries survive in present-day property lines and roadways. St. Helena has always been a crossroads, between the upper and lower valley, between Santa Rosa and the high valleys to the east. It was, and is, the hub of a thriving agricultural region, a commercial center more significant than the area within its city limits. More than most communities in California, St. Helena today retains its important natural resources and maintains its traditional purpose as a rural farming center.

Almost all of the architecturally and historically important buildings date from the period of the town's first prosperity from around the turn of the century. The Richie Block, the Goodman Building, the Saint Helena Hotel, the old Feed and Seed Building, and Beringer's Rhine House date from this period. So does the compact grid of streets that forms the original

residential district, with the distinctive Victorians on Hudson, Spring, Allyn, and Oak streets. The Presbyterian and Methodist churches, the Native Sons Hall, and several old stone winery buildings contribute to the nineteenth-century flavor. Other distinctive manmade landmarks are the Pope Street bridge, the Elm Tunnel, and the classic three-globed street lamps salvaged from the Pan Pacific Exposition of 1915.

Main Street is both the center and the symbol of St. Helena. It is what visitors see first and what residents value most. The old stone storefronts, the small shops, pickups driving in from the ranches, meeting friends in front of the Post Office or the hardware store--all make St. Helena what it is. But pressure for development that would change the town is increasing, particularly in the form of proposals directed toward tourists. Because interest in wine has grown, and because St. Helena is recognized as a town that has managed--so far--to preserve its traditions, more and more visitors are coming at all times of year. Although it would be a mistake to assume that tourism is new to St. Helena, it presents new challenges.

More than a hundred years ago, tourists were taking trains and buggies to visit the hot springs and drink the mineral waters in and around St. Helena. At the same time, people from San Francisco and Oakland were building summer and weekend places here. For a long time, this kind of development seemed to be easily absorbed by the community and the landscape--visitors and residents wanted the same things. More recently it has become clear that the unique character of St. Helena, what makes it

appealing to tourists and residents alike, is fragile. No longer can the growth and development of the community be expected to be automatically in harmony with its best interests.

This is where thoughtful and intelligent planning comes in. To guide St. Helena into the next decade and the next century, the City Council has adopted a design review procedure for which the guidelines that follow are the basis.

Naturally, design review involves subjective (but not arbitrary) judgements. These guidelines and the decisions made using them are founded on recognized principles of planning, design, construction, and aesthetics. The City's intent is not to encourage uniformity or dictate specific styles, but to facilitate harmony between new development and the fundamental but sensitive character of St. Helena.

The Design Review Board, made up of design professionals and lay citizens, evaluates the relatively intangible aspects of a project that go beyond planning and zoning, beyond height restrictions and setbacks. The Board looks at the way a project relates to the land and to its surroundings; whether its appearance is suitable to its location and use; whether its design is pleasing and appropriate to the community; and how the project contributes to the cherished quality of life in St. Helena.

The experience of other California communities has demonstrated that without vigilant use of careful zoning, planning, and design review, the delicate balances that give

communities their unique character can be lost forever. St. Helena has taken action to avoid this fate.

Sec. 24.3(b) of the Zoning Ordinance states:

"The Design Review Board shall develop additional criteria for review of architectural and landscape plan (sic)s. Such criteria shall be approved by the Planning Commission and City Council and shall be designed to form a basis of understanding between project designers and the Board on design objectives for St. Helena."

Forming the "....basis of understanding...between project designers and the Board on design objectives for St. Helena." is the primary purpose of these guidelines.

Taken as a whole, the guidelines which follow attempt to create a visual image of what St. Helena is like now, and how it wants to be; and to convey a design philosophy that can be used by designers as a basis for design proposals.

These guidelines should not be taken as hard and fast rules. On the other hand, the philosophy they express must not be ignored.

St. Helena does want to encourage creativity and diversity of design, but such must recognize and be sensitive to the nature of the environment in which it is being placed.

ARCHITECTURE

Architectural design, especially the exterior elements of buildings have a great impact on their immediate neighborhood and, by extension, all of St. Helena. Architectural design should be carefully considered so that the quality of the spaces created and modified and, therefore, the quality of life in St. Helena is always enhanced.

1. Harmony: Different structures and parts of structures should go well together. When new construction is proposed where old structures exist, especially in the historic downtown area, the new work should harmonize with the old. Generally, new construction in the downtown area should harmonize with the architecture of the era of the existing historic buildings. All proposed buildings or structures should be generally compatible with the neighborhood character where they will be built.
2. There should be an architectural consistency between all building elevations, including a consistent use of colors, materials, and detailing. "False" or "decorative" facade treatments, should be avoided, except where historically appropriate (i.e., western "false front buildings such as the razed planning mill). All elevations need not look alike; however, a sense of overall architectural continuity must occur. Detailing should add relief and shadow patterns to otherwise flat facades. Painted or false detailing

detracts from the integrity of structures and is discouraged.

3. Materials: Materials should be used honestly. Simulated wood or masonry, for example, generally is not acceptable. Generally, extensive use of flashy materials such as mill finished aluminum sash, reflective glass, enameled panels and similar materials should be avoided. Metal buildings are not discouraged, however, care must be taken to allow the design to reflect the inherent quality of the material.
4. Mechanical equipment and utilities: Mechanical and utility service equipment, including meter boxes should be designed as part of a structure and should be screened. Newspaper racks and phone booths should also be integrated into the design of the structure. Exterior vending machines, such as soft drink dispensers or cigarette machines, are strongly discouraged. Screening should be part of the building design; accessory structures added for screening probably will not be acceptable.
5. Continuity in style within a commercial area is critical. All buildings on the same site should have strong architectural and spatial relationships. Shops in the Safeway plaza: Smiths' Pharmacy, The Shoe Tree, etc. are good examples.
6. All building design should achieve a sense of human scale. Buildings should be broken into a series of volumes that lessen the apparent volume and mass. This can be accomplished on larger structures by integrating building

projections and recesses into the design (i.e., overhangs, bays, awnings, windows). The Richie Building is a good example.

7. The ground floor level(s) of commercial buildings where pedestrian activity is high should include elements of pedestrian interest. Display windows for retail shops, and courtyard entrances are suggested; for example the St. Helena Hotel Complex.
8. "Trade-mark" type of buildings are generally discouraged. For example, large "golden arches" or giant "buckets of chicken" buildings.
9. Building entries should be protected from the elements and should afford a "sense of entry" for the structure. Wall recesses, roof overhangs, window bays and similar features as integral elements of building design are suggested. Uses which visually disrupt the walking experience (such as open parking lots, parking structures, rear or delivery portions of buildings, etc.) should be avoided.
10. Roofs should be an integral part of building design. They should not dominate the overall form of the structure and should respond to the general design and nature of other roofs along the street.

SITE PLANNING

Site planning should be thought of as the organization of activities on a piece of land. This organization should stem from an overall concept under which indoor and outdoor spaces are planned simultaneously according to their various uses for the greatest comfort and enjoyment of the user.

General

1. When locating buildings, parking, and walkways on a parcel, all desirable existing site features should be used to an advantage including existing healthy trees, streams and other drainage features, land contours, rock out croppings, and good views.
2. Relating the location of site uses with adjoining properties should be employed to avoid possible conflicts and take advantage of mutual potentials.
3. Design elements should be of a scale appropriate to the way in which they are perceived. Pedestrian oriented feature can be rich in detail while vehicular oriented features should be simple and easily discernible.
4. Hillside development should be sited below the perceived skyline. Trees should be left which screen hillside structures. View windows can be cut through branches of screening trees, leaving the perception of naturally wooded hillsides as seen from the valley floor, while providing views for the new houses.

Service areas and utilities

5. Service areas should be located to provide convenient access for employees and service vehicles and should be architecturally compatible with the rest of the site development.
6. Service areas should be big enough to accommodate the use and screened from public view.
7. Utility lines should be placed underground where appropriate.

Parking

8. Parking areas should be safe and easily accessible, but not allowed to dominate the entire development. A project should not be shaped by or focus on its parking.
9. Parking should be screened from street views with planting, berms, low walls or by lowering the grade of the parking area below the street.
10. Parking should be located to the rear of the building when other screening won't work.
11. Parking areas should be landscaped to reduce visual impact, glare and reflected heat. Large canopy trees are to be provided in parking lots as required in Sec. 9.13.d of the Zoning Ordinance.

Circulation

12. Circulation systems should avoid conflict between vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic.
13. Circulation systems should be logical and readily understandable to the user.

14. Avoid locating screens or structures where they could block site lines, both when entering, exiting, and when driving through the site.
15. Bicycle racks should be provided near main entries where constant visual supervision is possible.
16. Old town St. Helena grew on a grid work of streets. Many later developments built their own internal circulation with cul-de-sacs. Extension of the existing grid is encouraged in order to unify the city in a logical system and maintain view corridors to the surrounding hillsides.

LANDSCAPING

The natural beauty of the surrounding vineyards and wooded hillsides form a critical frame of reference for St. Helena's ambience. Landscaping in St. Helena should recognize and incorporate natural and historic features into new projects and create imaginative, appropriate, and diverse environments. Stock plans, "greened up" areas and superficial landscaping do not add to the character of St. Helena, but dilute its unique visual appeal.

1. Significant trees, rock outcrops, and stands of native vegetation should be retained protected and integrated into the design where applicable. Features of this nature should be shown on preliminary site plans as "existing conditions" so that the impact of their inclusion or elimination can be judged.
2. The landscape design concept should; through the relationship of plant masses, open space, scale and plant forms, foliage and textures; create a functional and desirable environment. The concept should provide a sense of unity between various buildings on the site.
3. Landscape structures should reflect a sense of harmony, consistency of materials and honesty.
4. Pedestrian linkages through a site are encouraged. Entry walks should be obvious, inviting and compatible with the architectural style.
5. Landscaping incorporated into building design through the use of arbors, trellis' and planters are encouraged.

6. Water conservation is encouraged through properly designed, installed and maintained irrigation systems. Overspray beyond the site should be avoided by design.
7. Automatic water systems are encouraged. City approved backflow prevention devices are required.
8. Plant material should be suitable and adaptable to the site, capable of being properly maintained on the site and be of a variety suitable to the climate of St. Helena. Low water requirement plants are encouraged.
9. Select plants whose natural size is appropriate for the intended use. Size initial plantings for mature appearance in 3-4 years. Plant selection should also be based on year-round interest as well as form, texture, shape, and ultimate growth.
10. Use plant material to soften the hard lines or large volume of structures and to accent entries and define outdoor use areas.
11. Existing trees are especially important as heritage features of a site. Briefly, they should be inventoried for species, size and health before any site work is initiated. The area within the drip lines of trees should be protected from construction activities, such as compaction or trenching. Existing site conditions, such as irrigation volume and grade level should be retained where this would affect the health of that tree or shrub. More details are available in the City's John Muir Institute Study.

12. Use of large canopy shade trees in parking lots is encouraged. Screen parking lots with foliage, fences, berms or a combination of these elements while maintaining adequate site lines for safe circulation and ingress and egress.
13. Avoid trees with shallow roots near paving and avoid placing trees with roots which characteristically damage underground pipes near areas of underground utilities. (Chapter 17 of the City Code)
14. Landscapes should be maintained for consistency of design intent, adherence to above guidelines and enjoyment of neighboring properties.

SIGNS

The design of outdoor signing is a critical element in the overall appearance of a project. Signs should be designed with the purpose of identifying uses and adding accent to the visual quality of the building.

All new signs must conform to the standards set by the current City Sign Ordinance. However, the Design Review Board may recommend approval of signs not normally allowed when a variance application is being considered by the Planning Commission.

1. Signs should be employed to identify uses of structures and offer public information. They should not be used for advertising of name brand merchandise. The size and character of the sign should be appropriate to the type of business it is identifying. Size of lettering should also be appropriate to its use, whether to catch the eye of the passing motorist or a strolling window shopper.
2. Sign materials, size, color, lettering, location and arrangement should be an integral part of site and building design and should be compatible with their surroundings. Signing should be consistent in location and design throughout a development to avoid visual conflicts and competition among the building's occupants. Sign programs should be developed for multiple occupancy buildings to avoid visual conflicts and competition among the building's

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occupants. Signing should be simple, restrained and subordinate to the overall project design.

3. Lighting for signs should be in harmony with the signs' and project's design. If outside lighting is used, it should be arranged so the light source is shielded from view. Internal sign illumination is discouraged.
4. Standardized or corporate signing which does not relate to the building architecture is discouraged.



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